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## THE SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS OF JESUS IN ITS RELATION TO THE MESSIANIC HOPE. II.

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### 3. AN HISTORICAL VIEW WITH INTERPRETATIONS.

After having given the outline summary of the leading views on this great subject and the brief criticisms upon them, it remains to make some further suggestions which, it is hoped, may present the matter from a different point of view and throw some additional light upon its evident intricacies.

To start with the historical summit of Jesus' work on Calvary, or with the crisis at Cæsarea Philippi, is not necessary nor wise. It is not possible to argue from a summit attained, how the climber reached it. But knowing the traveler and his habits, one can tell what course he would take. Much more true is this of mental development. The story of Ericksen's boyish feats in military service, of Livingstone's struggles after an education, or of West's first endeavors at coloring with a very domestic brush, open doors into the characters developing within them. We must know Jesus first, and then we can tell how he became Jesus Christ, the Anointed Messiah. Our study must begin with a study of *him*, of the character and disposition to be moulded. The self-consciousness must be the basis of the Messianic consciousness. Were it otherwise, Jesus would have developed merely the Messianic ideas *of his age*.\*

(a) The first evidence we have of growing character in Jesus is in Luke 2:40; "And the child grew and waxed strong, becoming full of wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him." Although a part of the disputed gospel of the infancy, the fact of its naturalness and of my own desire and reasonable inclination to find at least a ground-work of history here, leads me to use the passage as historic evidence.

\*Cf. Beyschlag.

The passage is similar in its first statement to that concerning John the Baptist in the preceding chapter. In fact, the phrase "in [the] spirit" is added there, which is not weaker but parallel to the "becoming full of wisdom" here. We are told that he developed like other children, and that he learned by degrees not only the common things of life; but—to take the *sophia* "wisdom" in its Hebrew sense—the fear of God and the high things of religion. There is a suggestion of a spirit open to good, seeking after light and truth, of a child-like nature simple and pure, of which it can be said "the grace of God was upon him" as we speak of such a child to-day. It is not mere negative goodness; but an openness to what comes to it of good. The second trace of the child's character that we find appears in his twelfth year, when he lingered in the temple with those learned in the Law "both hearing them and, asking them questions: and all that heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers." He astonished his mother, who asked: "Child, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them: 'How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be in the things of my Father?' And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them."

Here we have two or three evidences of developing character which substantiate the lines we laid down in the first statement. For the highest good to the pious Jew was found in the Temple and in the Scriptures. From these two sources every pious heart was nourished, in them were seen the only ways to God. If they seemed incomplete, they were the only ways, and by searching the Scriptures was found the life which was sometimes lacking in a ritual practiced by a worldly-minded aristocrat whose religion was cold and whose life was formal. The Temple feasts were still gloriously carried out, and Josephus reckons by millions the attendants upon them. They were well calculated to impress a child's mind. The Temple became to him, acquainted with the Scripture history, the revelation of God in glory, His dwelling-place; the learned teachers of the law were, to his mind, engaged in the holiest work, about the things of the Father

of Israel. Engrossed in what he saw, transported by the feelings of the occasion, we find the child delaying, lost to his parents, yet content in the Temple. He had learned before, under pious tutelage at home and in the Synagogue, something of the sacred Books and of the Scribes, as well as of the Temple and its sense-enchancing services. Having experienced the latter, he must wait to learn something of the former; and, as he fell into the spirit of the Books they read and the questions exchanged, he found himself in the place of that son whom God had chosen; he felt for his nation and came to God's promises as an embodiment of the nation's innocence and purity, claiming their fulfilment. He was engrossed in the things of his Father.

Beyschlag,\* in opposition to Weiss, says: "That, aside from this all-powerful religious trait and inclination no other especial impulses of knowledge or method, directed toward the world as such, appeared in him . . . that of all else which, according to God's creative design, makes up the rich and in itself guiltless fulness of human life, nothing retains for him a personal significance . . . *That* is the necessary limitation of this peculiar nature in comparison with the all-sidedness of human nature."

He learned to read, no doubt, and to think; and he had an innocence of life, a perfect response of heart to the goodness required and a conscious fitness to receive the promises made to Israel. So he arose to a new idea which startled his parents, as the hints of it in his questions and answers had amazed the none too innocent legalists before him. He was himself as God's son. If a nation whose experiences of righteousness were like his own could be so named, he himself must be also worthy of the term "Son," no, not worthy, but he should receive it as a matter of course. Yet, when his parents took him, he "went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and he was subject unto them; and his mother kept all these sayings in her heart," for us. He was nothing but a child. He had the child's need of guidance. But in the direction of God-likeness he was open to a higher guidance, he knew a purer source of help and strength than his parents could give.

\* *Leben Jesu*. I., p. 172.

The nature within him had found a Nature without that was Father to it, and while he learned of life daily he meditated and communed with God. How beautiful the closing verse of this section of history: "And Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."

Such an open spirit, drawn by every promise of good, although from lowly sources, gathered strength with years, and with fuller knowledge of life and of himself was ready to welcome any movement which promised to bring his nation out of their strange lethargy into spiritual life, into the possibility of that communion with God which he himself experienced and which was promised to them. So when a John (perhaps influenced by his knowledge of his cousin's purity and depth of nature) proclaimed his message of repentance and a new successor to lead the people higher than he could, in spiritual regeneration, the whole nature of Jesus responded; and he felt drawn to that Baptism, bound to connect himself with it and accept the guidance of this higher leader whom John proclaimed for himself and for his people. So we have here again the proof of his character. It appears the same throughout his history. Heaven often opened to him, as the Jewish mind naively expresses communion with God, and he received God's spirit, and he saw Saints of old or armies of angels, all in the service of the Son of God, who labored for his Kingdom.

(b) The outside influences which met the glance of this pure soul, the shaping forces about him, were not simple and direct; but complex and opposing. We can look back and construct an organic unity of the Old Testament, leading—like the lines in perspective drawing—to the figure of Christ, which alone fills the vista. But history is not so simple in the making as when it lies completed before us.

We can find numerous sources of influence which must have operated upon the growing character and from which he must have drawn help or warnings, always instruction and food for thought.

The first is the home influence. The parents of Jesus were earnest Jews, as we can determine from the few traces of their lives which are preserved. While the history of the

child is their family history, we are taken into circles of religious thought and faithfulness in Temple and home. The visit to Elizabeth has at least a ground in character. The reception in the Temple has an atmosphere about it which must be that in which the boy Jesus grew. Such an air of faithful service and trust in the religious hope of the people of God must have prepared him for his faithful visit to the Temple. From that time on, new inspiration must have been quickening his receptivity of truth, and broadened observation his capacity. The Synagogue must have been open to him, and what is more natural than that his developing young manhood found in its reading of Scripture and in its discussion of the religion of his fathers and of his own day, food for thought and growth? It is not unnatural to suppose that the boy who puzzled doctors at Jerusalem, instructed and blessed his hearers as a young man in the open Synagogue. His wonderful aptness as a teacher, a little later, seems to require some such preparation. Yet no amount of study and meditation would have developed even so pure a youth into the Messiah whom we know. They, with the Synagogue experience, were useful and essential parts, but only such. There was need of more positive leadership. The ground was well laid, and the new structure was revealed at the Baptism. It was a great crisis in the experience of Jesus; his after-history, immediate and final, prove it. He expressed in it his longing for the Kingdom and his openness to light and leadership. Light was given him in the anointing by the Spirit, and the leadership was given to him for his people; his own leading was from God. Then first, does he realize what his Sonship means. The bud has blown, the sunlight has called out all the hidden forces into their full operation; he is the Messiah; no wonder that a season of overwhelming meditation comes upon him, and he is tempted. For the next and constant influence about him is the knowledge he has gained of the religious expectation of his people. He came to the baptism, perhaps, with the Messianic hopes of his people, as the only expression he knew for the general desire; yet he held them in a pure spirit which found no full expression by their means. Only because he had to express

himself in the language of his age did he use these forms. In the Old Testament he has found hints and promises of the glory of the everlasting Kingdom of Israel; in the Apocalypses he has read of the Vision born of constant disappointment and frequent depression, which took the place of that hope in the hearts of many of his fellow-countrymen. And about him he has seen the political longings of one and another nipped in the bud. He has felt the deep glow of passionate trust in the Psalms, and expressed his and his people's longing and highest faith in the words of the Proverbs of Solomon "Praying for a Kingly Messiah."

His nation is down-trodden, their religion is fast becoming a formalism with no life in it, ground to powder between the upper and nether mill-stones of Sadducee Priest and Pharisee Scribe. To find himself the Chosen One meant the necessity of uninterrupted review of all these facts, and hopes and disappointments. It demanded, first of all, an adjustment—a setting himself in relation to the entire religious life of his people, and the choice of a method of work.

These are the materials for growth which the Messianic idea had within him. If they are fairly presented, so far, there is no need to go farther at present, for the account of his life is an unfolding of his method, not evidence of growth already attained, and will be treated at the end of this paper. There is not a development of pure thinking here. That would have led him to a widely different method and totally different end. It would have convinced him that he was not the Messiah; but that he was a religious reformer for his people. His faith in the Kingdom was a faith in himself.

Spiritual natures must be open to spiritual truth, and quick to discern what concerns spiritual things. The loving mother wrapped up in affection for her child is quicker to know of danger and more ready to comprehend the object of her love, than any other is. It is a psychological fact that the thing we seek is the thing we find; we gain a quality of life by living it. "To him that hath shall be given." Even plants long for the light. Why should not the humanity of Jesus in unconscious drawing and impulse already gravitate according to its innate basis of life? "A receptiveness for the

Deity never existed," says Downer, "without its fulfilment." These two factors, complements of each other, are illustrated in the development of Jesus' Messianic consciousness. He surely had the spiritual nature. It was filled by God. The youth of Jesus was thus the preparation for the influx of mature knowledge and for security of decision and wisdom of choice. "A holy, natural security guided the child prior to its having, knowing, willing itself." He must have first possessed himself before he could give himself, and appear officially. The thought of his calling must have come to him in early life, as to all men. So, when the crisis came in Baptism, the nature was prepared to meet all questions that came to it, concerning times and methods. This did not come to pass instantly, fully, finally; it was a human nature; but it had a tenor of its own, and it saw that all of the future must lie along the lines of its pathway. Hence, for the inner things of spiritual moment, he must have been certain that the material, the earthy, the lower could not exist for him. Here I must differ from most authors that I have read, because this seems to me the only theory in accord with the nature we are studying. I quote from Dorner.\*

"It is true his most immediate mission could not have been to correct every error as it came to him from without; this was not his office. On the contrary, false Messianic representations, for example, such as were current amongst the religious of his people, might be deposited in him in his youth, without appropriating affirmation, and without instant rejection, before the time for him to reject had come.

"False Messianic ideals were a kind of temptation. His most peculiar work was to reject at the right time these possibilities. He was an *autodidact* in the highest sense, a *theodidaktos*. He knows truth because himself truth, the truth of what is human; to whom, also, pertains the divine as a property, and the truth of the divine which has become man in him." John 14: 6.

"His knowledge is acquired knowledge and to be morally restrained, but only acquired on the ground of his nature by means of the self-consciousness of his nature." "His knowl-

\* *System of Christian Doctrine*. III. "Perfectness of Jesus' Knowledge."



edge is not imaginative; but indubitably progressive. In divine things, the perfect knowledge belonging to his office." (Matt. 11: 25.) Baptism was a confession of his readiness to fulfill all righteousness. In it he secured both a personal subjective and an objective assurance of his mission. Then the consummation of his people becomes part of his personal consciousness, his own glorification. "Uncertainty respecting his mission, its aims and methods, would be a proof of immaturity, while a public appearance without maturity would not be obligatory, but presumptuous and indicative of sin, as a subsequent vacillation and change in his aims or plans would indicate error respecting himself and the world."\*

The incarnation thus is a gradual incoming of God into human form and nature, according to the laws which prevail within us. There is no magic about it. There is no exception, save the exception which a peculiar mission and unique gifts make. It is these gifts and this mission, or—what is subjectively the same thing,—his conviction regarding them, which makes the development of Jesus unique. Not to appreciate them, is to fail in the estimation of his Messianic consciousness. But they are held according to a law of development in our nature, and we have a Christ who is still Jesus, our brother, who can lead us on to the Father Whom he discovered in his spiritual living and Whom he shares with us.

\* Dorner.